A Cognitive Fluency-Based More-Less Asymmetry in Comparative Communication

KU LEUVEN

Vera Hoorens
University of Leuven

Susanne Bruckmüller
University of Koblenz-Landau

UNIVERSITÄT KOBLENZ · LANDAU

Normative logic: (X > Y) = (Y < X)
(X > Y): X possesses trait A more than Y
(Y < X): Y possesses trait A less than X

Ease of processing: (X > Y) > (Y < X)

(Unexpected) cognitive (dis)fluency → + (-) judgment

(X > Y) better liked, more agreed with & 'more true' than (Y < X)?

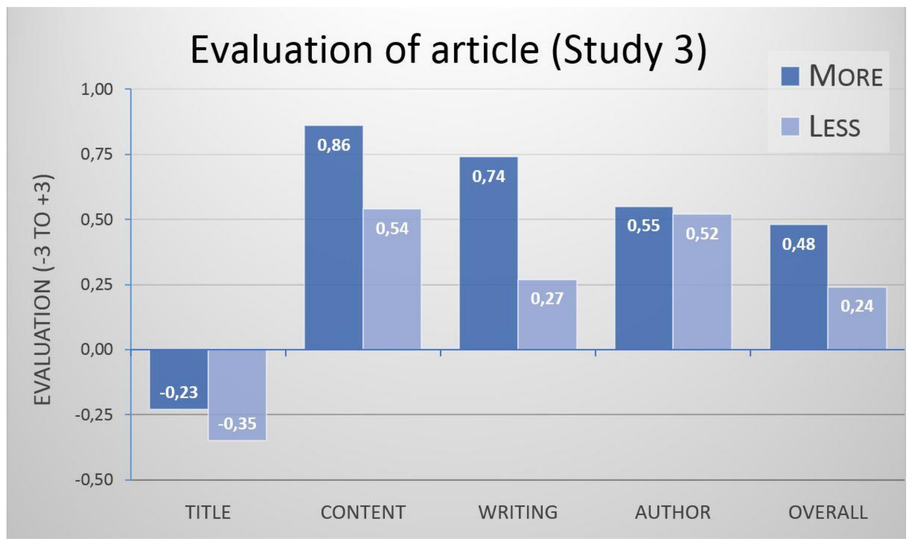
STUDY 1

- Listing differences / comparing
  - Study A: men & women (diff)
  - Study B: self/friend & peers
- Majority listed in (X > Y) format
- Irrespective* of
  - Desirability of characteristics
  - Target (group/individual)

* Some ordinal differences

STUDY 2 & STUDY 3: NEWSPAPER PARADIGM

- 'Evaluation of newspaper articles' comparing
  - Study 2: Younger and older employees
  - Study 3: Effects & side-effects of allergy medicines
- Manipulation: direction of comparison
- Measures: Evaluation title, content, writing, author (several items, -3 to +3, high = positive) + Study 3: list strengths & weaknesses
- Article with (X > Y) more favorably evaluated + Study 3: more strengths, fewer weaknesses



STUDY 4: SURVEY PARADIGM (W.S. MANIPULATION)

- Agreement (1-7) with 104 stated differences between
  - Study A: men and women
  - Study B: older and younger people
- Manipulation: direction of comparison (W.S.)
- Agreement (X > Y) > (Y < X), irrespective* of
  - Groups being compared
  - Desirability of comparison dimensions
  - Stereotype-consistency of statements

* Some ordinal differences

STUDY 5: SURVEY PARADIGM (B.S. MANIPULATION)

- Cf. Study 4; 20 stated men-women differences
  - Strongly stereotype-consistent or –inconsistent
- Agreement (X > Y) > (Y < X), no interactions

STUDY 6: JUDGMENTS OF TRUTH

- Truth (1-7) of 12 men-women differences
  - Items representing behaviors showing no gender differences
- Manipulation: direction of comparison (W.S.)
- Perceived truth (X > Y) > (Y < X)

STUDY 7: TESTING THE FLUENCY MECHANISM

- Prediction: More-less asymmetry reduced if people expect greater disfluency (Y < X) statements
- Replication & extension of study 5
- $(X > Y)$ vs. $(Y < X)_{standard}$ vs. $(Y < X)_{warning\ difficulty}$
- $(X > Y) > (Y < X)_{warning\ difficulty} > (Y < X)_{standard}$

Hoorens, V., & Bruckmüller, S. (2015) Less is more? Think again! A cognitive fluency-based more–less asymmetry in comparative communication, *JPSP*, *109*, 753-766.